



Letter to the Editor

A multidisciplinary approach to fatal dog attacks



Haj Salem and colleagues recently reported an interesting case of fatal dog attack with injuries to the cervical vertebrae and vertebral artery.¹ Although they discussed a “multidisciplinary approach to fatal dog attacks” the focus was unfortunately limited to pathological, odontological and DNA studies. A detailed history of the dog’s prior behaviour and the dog and victim’s interactions would have been important to obtain and, as has been previously discussed in published protocols for fatal dog attacks,^{2,3} it is often very useful to include a veterinarian or a veterinary pathologist within the investigative team. Information on the breed and weight of the dog may be significant, and examination should be extended beyond the dog’s mouth; for example, while not necessarily applicable to the reported case, a careful external examination may reveal signs of maltreatment or involvement in organized dog fighting. A necropsy may also provide useful information on the stomach contents and on possible underlying diseases that may initiate belligerent behaviour.² Toxicological assessment of the dog may also be useful in identifying any drugs or stimulants that may have been used to precipitate aggression.² Focusing of the attack on the victim’s face, neck and head is characteristic, but may also occur with post-mortem predation,⁴ so the demonstration of a vital reaction in the tissues was useful. However, although it is possible that the absence of defence injuries suggests that the fatal episode occurred proximate to an epileptic seizure, injuries elsewhere are not always present in victims because of the craniocentric focus of many of these attacks.²

Ethical approval

Not applicable.

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None.

Conflict of interest

None.

References

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